



City of Somerville

## PLANNING BOARD

City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

### 01 OCTOBER 2020 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Sam Dinning	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Rob Buchanan	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Rebecca Lyn Cooper (Planning & Zoning), Sarah Lewis (Planning & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and adjourned at 6:49pm

#### **PUBLIC HEARING: 101-153 South Street**

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the hearing to October 15, 2020.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>CONTINUED TO 10/15/20</b>
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**OTHER BUSINESS:** Proposal to change the zoning district for 8 properties between 368 and 414 on McGrath Highway.

Chair Capuano asked staff to confirm that this item was still under debate and may be amended by the Land Use Committee.

Ms. Cooper confirmed.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the hearing to October 15, 2020.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>CONTINUED TO 10/15/20</b>
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**OTHER BUSINESS:** Proposal to change 34 and 36 Merriam Street from Neighborhood Residence to the Urban Residence district.

Ms. Cooper stated that the proposal for Merriam Street was also kept in committee by the Land Use Committee.

Chair Capuano noted that, as the Merriam Street parcels were also held in committee and may be subject to change, that he proposed to continue discussion to the October 15 meeting.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the hearing to October 15, 2020.

<b>RESULT:</b>
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<b>CONTINUED TO 10/15/20</b>
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**OTHER BUSINESS:** Proposal to change 56 Murdock Street from the Neighborhood Residence to the Urban Residence district.

Chair Capuano noted that the substance of the request was for one parcel on Murdock Street to be changed from Neighborhood Residence to Urban Residence, noting that the change was sponsored by Councilor Niedergang on behalf of the property owner. He observed that the parcel would fit in congruously with adjacent parcels and recalled Councilor Niedergang's comment that the parcel should have been changed when the new Zoning Ordinance was adopted at the end of 2019. Councilor Niedergang was in support of the change.

Member Aboff felt that the request was reasonable and appropriate given the neighborhood context.

With no further discussion from members of the Planning Board, Chair Capuano moved to recommend adoption of this proposed map change.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to send its recommendation that the City Council approve the proposed map change.

<b>RESULT:</b>
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<b>RECOMMENDED</b>
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**OTHER BUSINESS:** Proposal to change the zoning district for six parcels in Gilman Square; 345 Medford Street, 350 Medford Street, 360 Medford Street, 91 Marshall Street, 255 Pearl Street, and a final parcel on Medford Street that does not have an associated address.

Chair Capuano invited Councilor Clingan to address the Planning Board, reminding those in attendance that this invitation did not constitute a reopening of public testimony and noting that the Planning Board regularly takes testimony from elected officials.

Ms. Cooper noted that Director Sarah Lewis was also in attendance and could give some updates on work that was done in the Land Use Committee recently on this proposal.

Councilor Clingan noted that he was in support of the map change, reporting that, as the ward councilor, he had every intention of making the Ward 4 side of Gilman Square Mid Rise 6. He worked with the community, who had wanted to keep it Mid Rise 4 with the hopes that there would be an overlay district applied to the area by this point. In the absence of an overlay, reflecting the will of the local community and of him as Councilor, he asked that the Planning Board approve the proposed map change for parcels on the Ward 4 portion of the Square.

Councilor Clingan further noted that the move to six stories made sense for the area, given the topography and relative height of other buildings in the area, noting that the area was a transit node and that it was the community's will to make more density possible in the immediate location.

Chair Capuano recalled from earlier testimony that parcels in Gilman Square were originally placed in the Mid Rise 4 zoning district in the expectation of an overlay district. He noted that the neighborhood seemed to be in agreement about the proposed increase in density despite the fact that the overlay was not currently in place. He agreed that the best way to follow the intent of the neighborhood would be to adopt the map change, given that the change made sense for the location.

Director Lewis noted that she was in attendance at the Land Use Committee's meeting on Tuesday, September 29th, during discussion of this particular map amendment and that, as Councilor Clingan had referenced, there were some changes made to the proposal for parcels in the Ward 3 portion of the Square. She reported that it was Councilor Ewan-Campen's intent to take the Ward 3 parcels out of the citizen amendment to make sure that there would be a community process for those sites and the possibility for a deeper look at the neighborhood in general. He updated the citizen proposed map change to keep the corner parcel in the Mid Rise 4 district, and to move the other parcel, currently a city owned parcel also referred to as the Homan's Building site, to the Civic district until a more comprehensive review could be taken of the of the area.

Chair Capuano thanked Ms. Lewis for her clarifications, noting that the reasoning underlying the change made sense given the Councilor's goal of providing for further study of potential activity on those parcels.

Councilor Clingan reported that the amended amendment passed with the community's support as well as his, noting that he and Councilor Ewen-Campen worked with the community to come to agreement on how to move forward, and made it clear that the entire Council supported the amendment.

Following a brief pause for minor technical difficulties, Director Lewis recapped the changes made at the Land Use Committee and discussion for the Board.

Chair Capuano noted that the City Council's amendment would allow the community process to continue as the City and Board continued investigating the characteristics of Gilman Square and opened the discussion to the Board.

Member Buchanan agreed that the proposal made sense for the parcels currently under consideration. He also asked about a remaining oddly shaped parcel that appeared to be a public park and asked Staff to confirm whether it made sense for that parcel to be moved to the Civic district as well. He also asked if there were other parcels owned by the City that, as with the Homan's Building, should be moved into the Civic district.

Director Lewis noted that she couldn't speak specifically to all other potential sites across the city, but that the area Mr. Buchanan referred to was currently open because of the considerable grade change across the site, and noted that the space would be considered as part of further implementation work in the Square. She reported on other work being completed for the Square, including a streetscape redesign effort undertaken by the Mobility Division that would help inform further implementation of the Neighborhood Plan.

Vice Chair Aboff noted that she had some uncertainty about the proposal and was not fully comfortable with the planning process behind the map changes that had been proposed. She noted that she was heartened to see a citizen-led proposal for an increase in density and a change in zoning outside of the usual cycle of the neighborhood planning process, but observed that an overlay district would typically be crafted to provide community benefits in conjunction with the higher density allowed. She observed that the Board might be approving higher density without coming up with a mechanism for requiring the community benefits that were envisioned at the time by the community and the City. Vice Chair Aboff asked for assurance from Planning Staff that they were comfortable that moving the parcels into a new district was the correct approach, despite the absence of a full planning effort in the absence of a more fulsome planning process.

Chair Capuano reminded all in attendance that the Board's role was to provide input and a recommendation to the City Council, who has the statutory authority to make the map changes. He noted that the Board may want to condition their recommendation with the concerns that Vice Chair Aboff had proposed.

Ms. Lewis noted that from an urban design standpoint, Planning Staff were comfortable with the Mid Rise 6 map change and recalled Councilor Clingan's note that it had been his intent for the area to be taller and denser due to the proximity to the MBTA station.

Vice Chair Aboff asked Staff if there were other parcels outside the set proposed as part of the amendment which should be included, and how the Board would respond should a similar community led proposal come forward for parcels adjacent to the current area.

Councilor Clingan noted that all parcels were looked at during the zoning overhaul process and evaluated for step down from higher density, and that it was possible for the community to consider densifying other areas as we go forward. For the proposal in question, he reported that it had always been in his intention for these parcels to provide for higher density.

Vice Chair Aboff expressed her appreciation for the clarifications and indicated that her goal was to ensure that proposals for the Square reflected the significant amount of thought and community engagement that has gone into discussion about this neighborhood.

Ms. Lewis noted that Ms. Aboff's comments could be incorporated into the Board's recommendation. Chair Capuano concurred.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to send its recommendation that the City Council approve the proposed map change as amended by the Committee.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>RECOMMENDED</b>
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**OTHER BUSINESS:** Proposal to make an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to the standards of Subsection 9.2.4.d for Cannabis Retail Sales uses.

Chair Capuano noted that this item was added to the Planning Board's agenda during the joint hearing at the last minute. He asked staff to give a brief overview.

Ms. Lewis explained that the error came in translating the previous format of the Cannabis Ordinance to the new format of the Zoning Ordinance, resulting in an inadvertent error that limited the location of some adult-use facilities that wasn't in keeping with the intent of the drafters of the document.

Chair Capuano clarified that the change would result in bringing the text of the Ordinance into agreement with the intent behind its creation, noting that the text as drafted was unintentionally more restrictive than it was proposed to be and would therefore harm potential applicants. He agreed that the change made sense, particularly as this action represented a correction that would bring the enforcement of the ordinance into alignment with its intent.

Vice Chair Aboff asked for confirmation that the changes would be applied to locations for both retail and medical cannabis establishments.

Ms. Lewis confirmed that the change would be applied equally.

Upon confirmation that no other questions remained, Chair Capuano made a motion to recommend approval of the changes. The motion was seconded by Clerk Dinning, and the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to send its recommendation that the City Council to make an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to the standards of Subsection 9.2.4.d for Cannabis Retail Sales uses.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>RECOMMENDED</b>
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*NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning & Zoning Division at [planning@somervillema.gov](mailto:planning@somervillema.gov).*